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robert booth

ABJECT WITHDRAWAL?

on the prospect of a nonanthropocentric object-oriented ontology

Abstract Despite exerting considerable influence on other academic disciplines and mainstream environmental thought, object-oriented ontology has attracted little critical engagement from academic philosophers as a philosophy in its own right. Here, I address one aspect of this oversight by exploring Timothy Morton's claim that "being ecological" – cultivating the anticolonial and nonanthropocentric mindset to disrupt environmental crises – requires an object-oriented purview. Working against the backdrop of the Anthropocene, I firstly reconstruct Morton's two main arguments for the power and ecological promise of object-oriented ontology. With some help from (eco)feminist theory, I then argue that, despite its radically nonanthropocentric façade, object-oriented ontology retains some problematic aspects of the dualistic thinking that it rightly pits itself against. More specifically, because object-oriented ontology retains the absence/presence binary of the subject/object dualism as one of its basic metaphysical commitments, it appears destined to perpetuate an insidious anthropocentrism by either fetishizing or collapsing the alterity of the nonhuman things it aims to rethink. Object-oriented ontology seems, therefore, poorly suited to the task that Morton sets for it.

Keywords object-oriented ontology; Timothy Morton; Graham Harman; Anthropocene; ecofeminism; anthropocentrism

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abject withdrawal?

1 introduction

"No one in a philosophy department is going to be taking Tim Morton seriously" says Claire Colebrook (qtd in Blasdel). Typically regarded as a sort of Renaissance Man more adept at offering stirring calls for ecological responsibility than constructing a philosophically compelling theoretical position from the dizzying range of sources upon which he draws, Morton has even been accused of propagating "an online orgy of stupidity" (Brassier, qtd in Blasdel). But here I intend to take Morton's work very seriously indeed. Here is why. Whilst specifically philosophical engagement with object-oriented ontology (OOO) has been largely limited to contesting the rigour of its critique of post-Kantian "Continental" philosophy and/or its portrayal of such philosophy as problematically "correlationist,"[1] OOO is becoming increasingly influential in other academic disciplines. Whilst it might be wise to take his fellow object-oriented ontologist Graham Harman's remark that Morton's ideas and terminology are "slowly infecting all the humanities" (qtd in Blasdel) with a pinch of salt, OOO is demonstrating considerable impact in fields like political geography and social theory, where a renewed concern to evade an insidious anthropocentrism is paramount.[2] OOO's shadow also casts as far as archaeology and educational theory.[3] Indeed, according to data from Google Scholar, Morton has amassed nearly eight thousand citations over the past ten years and, in a recent list of the most influential living philosophers based on a University-of-Chicago-approved approach to citation and impact analysis, he came in at number thirty: just above Thomas Nagel.[4] At number eighteen – sandwiched between Saul Kripke and Jürgen Habermas – placed Harman. Moreover, as the success of his recent mass market paperback book on the Pelican imprint (not to mention articles in the *New York Times*, *New Yorker*, *Newsweek*, and *Guardian*) indicates, Morton's OOO, in particular, is steadily

infecting mainstream thinking on various facets of the environmental crisis popularly designated "the Anthropocene," and doing so largely unchecked by academic philosophers.[5] Thus, I contend, it is no longer enough for philosophers to react defensively against Harman's interpretations of Heidegger or Husserl, or idly cast a sideways glance whilst Morton informs important work in environmental politics, the environmental humanities, or mainstream environmental activism. It is time to critically engage with OOO on its own terms.

In this paper, then, I aim to forego many of the grievances that philosophers may legitimately have against OOO and focus instead on the question of why OOO might *matter*. I will concern myself only with addressing OOO's ostensive ability to address the more-than-human world on its own terms as a means of disrupting the problematically anthropocentric behaviours which led to the so-called Anthropocene. Since, in OOO, addressing these sorts of questions is a task that is most explicitly undertaken by Morton, I shall focus on his work here. However, since the basic metaphysical framework which underpins Morton's claims about OOO's alleged nonanthropocentrism is appropriated more-or-less uncritically from Harman, I shall also explore these commitments in some detail.

Here is the plan. With a little exegetical help from Harman and some ecofeminist theory, I will firstly offer an in-depth reconstruction of Morton's two main arguments why disrupting the anthropocentric and utilitarian mindset behind our crisis situation requires the radical extension of intentionality characteristic of OOO. I will then argue that the metaphysical presuppositions behind OOO are problematic for Morton's goals insofar as they unduly limit the heterogeneity of nonhuman phenomena. This is because OOO is *necessarily* limited by binary thinking under which "objects" – which comprise their entire ontology – are either wholly present and knowable to us humans (reinforcing the anthropocentric colonialism which Morton rightly associates with mainstream scientific realism), or wholly "withdrawn" and unknowable (fetishizing nonhuman alterity in a manner that mirrors the

abject withdrawal?

mysterianism that Beauvoir identifies in androcentric patriarchy). Since both positions reinscribe the dualistic logic that Morton himself identifies as a root cause of the environmental crisis, I will argue, OOO appears dangerously ill-equipped for the task in hand.

2 the argument from agrilogistics

Morton's arguments for the environmental value of OOO are most clearly formulated in his 2018 book *Being Ecological*.[6] His starting point in that work is to provide an account of the root causes of the Anthropocene: a geological epoch in which "all kinds of plastics, concretes and nucleotides, for example, have formed a discrete and obvious substratum," and which, like the expert Working Group of the Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy (WGA), Morton takes to begin in 1945 with a "Great Acceleration" of nuclear activity, industrial waste, fuel emissions, and so on (*Being Ecological* 43; Steffen, Crutzen, and McNeill 617) Morton gleefully omits much of the unsettling evidence that the WGA cites in favour of acknowledging an epochal shift, telling us that his book "contains no ecological facts, no unsettling revelations" (*Being Ecological* 3). However, Morton acknowledges that the Anthropocene is a troubling more-than-biogeochemical phenomenon: a "Sixth Mass Extinction Event," which scientists have elsewhere unpacked in terms of massive biodiversity loss, ocean acidification, desertification, and anthropogenic climate change (*Being Ecological* 43; SQS; Steffen, Crutzen, and McNeill).

Morton thus identifies the Anthropocene as an epoch characterized by profound, problematic, and irreversible anthropogenic changes inaugurated largely through rapid industrialization and urbanization. However, his account of its underpinnings should not be

confused with the somewhat apolitical standard narrative adopted by Paul Crutzen, the atmospheric chemist who coined the Anthropocene moniker. The standard narrative holds that the Anthropocene straightforwardly resulted from a generalized species of practical behaviours which misappropriated the available "natural resources" (i.e., the causal powers latent within the determinate physico-chemical properties by which fossilized carbon deposits, for instance, might be exhaustively characterized) (Steffen, Crutzen, and McNeill). Morton contends that the standard narrative normalizes – and subsequently ontologizes – a historically situated and colonial mode of relating to the more-than-human world, which licences the anthropogenic violence manifested in rabid deforestation and unsustainable waste production through the violence already implicit in the anthropocentric, exploitative and patriarchal terms it reifies. As he apparently admits (*Being Ecological* 50), Morton's viewpoint, therefore, has more in common with that of ecofeminists like Val Plumwood and Carolyn Merchant. These ecofeminists take the aforementioned "environmental issues" to be rooted in an epistemology of mastery which, by implicitly naturalizing a hierarchical and hyperseparational ontology of human subjects and nonhuman use-objects, also encourages the habituation of the problematic behaviours which characterize the Anthropocene. For Morton and these ecofeminists, it is the dualistic logic crystalized in the implicitly utilitarian metaphysical framework employed by mainstream scientific naturalists like Crutzen which is the motor of the Sixth Mass Extinction Event, and not simply one of its many manifestations (i.e., the specifically *unsustainable* use of "natural resources").

Morton differs from these ecofeminists, however, by attributing the birth of this problematic mindset neither to the reification of the reason/nature dualism that Plato allegedly inaugurated via recourse to his Forms (Plumwood, *Mastery of Nature* 45), nor to the naturalized subjugation of (feminized) material bodies via the scientific method: Francis Bacon's persisting contribution to modernity (Merchant, *Death of Nature* 169). For Morton,

abject withdrawal?

we need to look further back. He contends that we remain prone to conflate the reductive and utilitarian "data" of natural science with its underpinning nonhuman "things" because of what Morton calls "*agrilogistics*": the logistics of the dominant modes of agriculture that have proliferated for ten thousand years (*Being Ecological* 49–50). On Morton's account, agrilogistics is borne of a survival logic, beginning in the context of (mild) Neolithic global warming, which motivated the need to store grain, form discrete communities, and forge thinly demarcated (and increasingly contentious) distinctions between "human" and "nonhuman" realms, whereby the latter – the underside – is reductively characterized as alien, resource, threat, or all of the above. For Morton, it is this dualistic conceptual orientation, complete with its "now ancient and obviously violent monotheisms" (manifested in the ontotheological impetus of the enlightenment project, for instance), which feeds through to modernity and, ultimately, ensures that contemporary scientific approaches are imbued with the colonial logic of "agricultural monotheism" (*Being Ecological* 50, 56). Elsewhere, Morton thus claims that "the lineage which brought us slavery and racism is also the lineage which brought us the anthropocentric boundary between human and nonhuman. This boundary is predicated in part on another rigid distinction between person and thing" (Morton, "They are Here" 167).

Morton identifies a further, tragic, feature of agrilogistics: its propensity to bring about the demise of its adherents through the social, political, and technoscientific "survival advantages" through which it replicates itself. He notes, for example, that, in an attempt to eradicate the bitter taste of the tannins which indicate poison to even a juvenile palate, "Western" agribusiness has bred out much of the nutritional value of corn and potatoes (Morton, "Agrilogistics"). However, in small doses, "poisons" like anthocyanins are invaluable in preventing cardiovascular disease and some cancers (Robinson). By diminishing the availability of anthocyanins on an industrial scale, therefore, we effectively

facilitate a significant increase in premature deaths. For Morton, a similar logic is behind surging obesity rates linked to fast food production in North America (*Being Ecological* 155). Filling in some of Morton's blanks, we find similar and arguably more convincing identifications of this paradoxically irrational mindset in the ecofeminist literature. Plumwood and Trish Glazebrook, for instance, emphasize the self-destructive logic within various facets of the environmental crisis from the unsustainable water depletion and massive biodiversity loss resulting from reliance on large-scale mechanized monocultures (including the "Ultrasweet" corn beloved of North American consumers) to the desertification resulting from anthropogenic climate change, which is steadily making the Earth inhospitable to growing any grain whatsoever (Glazebrook 17; Plumwood, *Environmental Culture* 16).[7]

But the ills of this purview are not limited to their manifestations in capitalistic agribusiness. Morton contends (again, without specific details) that agrilogistics pervades deep ecological and anarcho-primitivist approaches, where recommendations for better "resource use" rely on similarly dualistic battle lines regarding what constitutes a "pest" or "weed" (*Being Ecological* 153). Likewise, Glazebrook has argued that so-called "Green Revolution" agriculture does systemic violence to displaced (and overwhelmingly female) subsistence farmers and the local environment through the large-scale irrigation infrastructure and multinational seed genetics programmes on which it relies (17). Glazebrook's example here is striking. Smaller-scale, traditional agriculture is generally more adaptable to local conditions and better promotes biodiversity. However, objections to it – overwhelmingly framed in terms of anthropocentric concerns about its labour-intensive nature, that it makes little measurable contribution to GDP (gross domestic product), and so on – each speak to Morton's contentions about agrilogistics' pseudo-religious fervour for technoscientific developmentalism over "ridiculous" (yet apparently more sustainable and less violent) "primitivism" (*Being Ecological* 151). We might push Morton's claims further with reference

abject withdrawal?

to recent claims made by David King – one of the chief brokers of the Paris Climate Accord – that averting climate disaster requires *radical* technoscientific developmentalism: geoengineering the Earth's climate by sending huge mirrors into space, or seeding marine clouds with sea salt to make them reflect more sunlight, despite our general ignorance as to what the long-term results might be (*Being Ecological* 206; Pearce).

In each of these examples, Morton thinks, there is an unwillingness to challenge what needs to change: the (irrational) dualistic conceptual scheme which demands violent and politically dubious fault lines between the human and nonhuman, variously conceived. However, as Morton's damning indictment of anarcho-primitivism is intended to convey, overturning this lamentable failure may be more difficult than it might seem insofar as "dismantling the underpinnings of agricultural logistics [also] involves dismantling the 'metaphysics of presence,' the idea that to exist is to be constantly present: to exist is to be a lump of extended stuff underlying appearances" (*Being Ecological* 155). According to the exclusionary logic of agricultural monotheism, the metaphysics of presence consists in the view that nonhuman "things are objectified lumps of something like plastic, lying 'over there,' that I can manipulate at will" (79). In the environmental issues surveyed above, it is the "regular flavour" metaphysics of presence within mainstream scientific realism which permits only a reductive, physicalist ontology of entities that are reducible to determinate and determinable physico-chemical properties, linked via linear causal matrices, without novel causal powers of their own (156). Harman accuses this approach of "undermining": anthropocentrically misrepresenting nonhuman entities by taking the metaphysical reality of *things* (e.g., forest ecosystems, Bali starlings, or coal deposits) to be derivative from their constituent *properties* (e.g., their latent causal powers to heat, generate electricity, or influence other biospheric relationships), each of which implicitly retains use-value for human consumers (*Quadruple Object* 9–10).[8]

More problematically, as ecofeminists like Plumwood (*Environmental Culture* 41) have also argued, this form of the metaphysics of presence is inseparable from an anthropocentric epistemology of mastery because its reductive terms licence a totalizing epistemological purview that is non-accidentally aligned with the colonial project of owning and controlling the more-than-human world (hence the Baconian goal of a complete science). However, as in the case of the human/nonhuman dualism of which various human beings have fallen foul (e.g., "women" under patriarchy, "non-whites" under Apartheid, "Dalits" under certain Indian caste systems), the veneer of metaphysical innocence is retained via the violent *abjection* of others; specifically, the abjection of other legitimate (i.e., heterogeneous, nonreductive, and nonanthropocentric) ways of characterizing those phenomena.[9] As Morton notes, the problem here is not only the reification of a single, reflectively purified, transcendent purview, but also that – as quantum mechanics appears to show – this ideally predictable and mechanistic paradigm is simply false: a "huge amount of violence goes into sustaining this view, precisely because it isn't accurate" (*Being Ecological* 55, 79; *Realist Magic* 81).

Morton's first main contention, then, is that the Anthropocene's emblematic conditions are symptomatic of agrilogistics, the rectification of which is incompatible with mainstream scientific responses insofar as they rely upon the metaphysics of presence which is one of its most significant manifestations. For Morton, this problematizes the "information dumping" of much well-meaning environmental theory, whereby terrifying scientistic factoids ("10,000,000 fewer people will be displaced by flooding if we limit global temperature rises to 1.5 rather than 2 degrees Celsius!") are uncritically presented as crises requiring urgent practical means of rectification ("we *must* reduce carbon emissions by 45% before 2030!" (McGrath)). To reiterate: the main problem here is that much of the violence is already done via the reification of a certain species of intentional objects – via the violent

abject withdrawal?

abjection of others – and the naturalization of implicitly dualistic and utilitarian means of relating to them. Information dumping the piecemeal factoids reproduced by this purview, therefore, has the effect of enframing the environmental crisis as an *overwhelming* collection of "issues" which inoculates its underpinning conceptual scheme from deeper investigation and actively inhibits sustained, engaged action in the wholescale manner seemingly required. Thus, Morton contends, "information dump mode is making ecological experience, ecological politics and ecological philosophy utterly impossible" (*Being Ecological* 56).

If, Morton argues, quite reasonably, "ecological action means *not doing as much damage*, rather than doing things more efficiently" (*Being Ecological* 56), then it seems we should widen our metaphysical nets and entertain conceptual frameworks which are attentive to the contextual features which sustain the violence of abjection by which "data" becomes "thing." For Morton, this requires radically flattening our ontology such that entities are irreducible to the intentional objects ("data") they emit, because things licence various, partial, and non-exhaustive means of access – not all of which, he contends, are cognitive – to heterogenous human parties and the nonhuman entities with which they are ontologically continuous. If we "really want to get over the modern period," Morton says, "this is what you have to do. Give up fighting for the value of little pieces of human candy. See the aesthetic dimension as the life blood of reality" (*Realist Magic* 80). For Morton, this means acknowledging that "what spoons do when they scoop up soup is not very different to what I do when I talk about spoons […] because intelligence and being alive are aesthetic appearances-for some other phenomenon, including the object in question" ("Poetry" 215).

3 the argument from correlationism

To fully appreciate what may make a specifically OOO uniquely well-positioned to make good on the promise of nonanthropocentrism, we should pause to consider Morton's second argument, which arises in response to the following objection. Whilst the above might motivate a critical approach to environmental theory – where the reality of the environmental crisis is used to problematize the value-laden terms in which that crisis is couched – we do not obviously need OOO for *that*. Given that Morton's specifically Neolithic backstory is arguably of little consequence for the identification of the dualistic logic that does most of the heavy lifting above, the argument from agrilogistics appears more-or-less equally amenable to the progressive naturalist approach typical of ecofeminism. The same might be said for contemporary ecoconstructivism[10] and ecophenomenology,[11] both of which are expressly critical of the metaphysics of presence and remain radically self-reflexive about "their own social and transformative character" (Vogel 35).

Morton's objection (*Being Ecological* 155–56) to these approaches, however, is that they retain some of the worst traits of agricultural monotheism because they retain its dualistic logic. Harman expands on this claim by arguing that phenomenologists and social constructivists anthropocentrically "overmine" their target objects by radicalizing the inward-facing project of Kantian self-critical reflexivity (*Quadruple Object* 10–11). Harman claims that they are thus committed to what Quentin Meillassoux has called "correlationism" – the prime evil of post-Kantian philosophy – which "consists in disqualifying the claim that it is possible to consider the realms of subjectivity and objectivity independently of one another" (Meillassoux 5). Under correlationism's overmining strategy, Harman claims, "[a]n object is exhausted by its presence for another, with no intrinsic reality held cryptically in reserve" (*Quadruple Object* 12). For "postmodern" approaches like phenomenology and critical theory, he contends, nonhuman things cannot be addressed without the caveat "for *us*" (Harman, *Guerrilla Metaphysics* 42). However, since, Morton argues, "for us" here relates

not only to the monopolized epistemological and ontological norms of a human purview, but also to one in which the violent terms which typify that purview are habitually privileged, "correlationism is anthropocentrism in philosophical form" ("Here Comes Everything" 164). As for the nonhuman things interrogated, Morton claims, they retain much the same inert plasticity seen in mainstream science's undermining strategy because they remain unable to resist their construction or (pejorative) objectification by human interrogators, remaining vulnerable to the colonial behaviours and attitudes licenced by that characterization.[12] By limiting epistemic access to a remarkably narrow range of phenomena *present* to human consciousness, correlationism allegedly results in a de facto metaphysical idealism which mirrors the garden variety metaphysics of presence seen in mainstream scientific realism (Harman, *Guerrilla Metaphysics* 42).[13]

It might be tempting to argue that, insofar as they remain committed to metaphysical realism via a *progressive* naturalism, ecofeminists like Plumwood (*Mastery of Nature*; *Environmental Culture*) and Chris Cuomo (*Ecological Communities*) need not be tarred with the same anthropocentric brush. However, Morton would argue that these ecofeminisms remain committed to agrilogistics because, by retaining recourse to mind-independent ("nonhuman") things-in-themselves, they mistakenly attempt to purify the implicitly correlational terms of their human investigators, however "progressive." In support of this line of argument we might note that ecofeminists do have a track record of attributing humanoid properties and suspiciously anthropomorphic intentions to nonhuman entities like glaciers and even "nonhuman-nature-in-itself," which Merchant understands to be a hyperbolically autonomous, teleological centre of life (Plumwood, *Mastery of Nature* 138; Merchant, *Earthcare* 221). This problem affects even "radically perspectival" ecofeminisms like Karen Warren's which accommodate the contention that "[t]here is no ontologically prior […] ecological description of nature" (155), but only through recourse to incompossible

phenomena (e.g., dynamic subsystems, individual organisms, holistic energy flows) observed at different spatio-temporal and trophic levels by *situated human scientists*. These implicitly anthropocentric purifications of "nature" may further perpetuate anthropogenic violence because ecofeminists' ontological contentions are also usually intended to provide a normative (i.e., "progressive") foundation for social projects like practical means of addressing the environmental crisis (Bannon 35).[14]

For Morton, overcoming agrilogistics means navigating the Scylla of modernism and the Charybdis of postmodernism, each of which effectively subsumes nonhuman entities under the violent terms of their situated human investigators. "Correlationism," Morton contends,

> is true: you can't grasp things in themselves, facts are different from data and data is different from things. But that doesn't mean that what gets to decide what's real – the correlator, the decider – is more real than those things. (*Being Ecological* 53)

For Morton, disrupting the dualistic violence of the Anthropocene requires more than jettisoning the metaphysics of presence; it also requires radicalizing the correlationist purview, with a few choice metaphysical tweaks. Harman explains:

> my own complaint with Kant is not that he preserved the things-in-themselves, but rather that he saw them as haunting human knowledge rather than relationality more generally. Like Whitehead I hold that the in-itself is real. Yet I also hold that this reality remains unattained by inanimate causal relations no less than human subjects. For there is, in fact, a cotton-in-itself that withdraws from the fire no less than from human awareness. (*Quadruple Object* 137)

abject withdrawal?

If correlationism's anthropocentrism consists in its de facto reduction of nonhuman things to the data with which humans are presented, then, Harman and Morton think, this can be overcome by extending a radicalized notion of intentionality within the context of a flattened ontology. Harman's reference to Alfred North Whitehead is instructive in this regard. Whitehead argued that "prehension" is a more fundamental species of aesthetic or affective contact between human and nonhuman entities alike, and that *all* such encounters are thus experiential in the deflationary sense that "consciousness presupposes experience and not experience consciousness" (*Process and Reality* 53). For Whitehead, thinking that things work the other way around, as Kant insisted, requires the unjustified – and, following Morton, plausibly dualistic – "bifurcation of nature" (Whitehead, *Concept of Nature* 24) into two ontologically primitive orders (i.e., the subjective/phenomenal and objective/noumenal) which, for Morton, terminates in the correlationist problematic, not because correlationism is the inevitable result of critique, but because the dualistic logic in which critique is steeped reifies a distinction in kind between (human) subject and (nonhuman) object.

Instead, Harman clarifies, causation should be understood as just one more species of proto-intentional or "*sensual*" relationship in which fire, for example, "metaphorizes" cotton, "distorting [it], caricaturing [it], bringing [it] into play only partially" (*Guerrilla Metaphysics* 172). The fire interacts with *some* of the cotton's sensuous qualities: its flammability, for instance. However, the fire is just one situated object amongst others (humans included), and so, as in *all* "interobjective" encounters, it cannot exhaust its target object.[15] The fire has no access to the cotton's "aroma"; the cotton experiences the fire's heat but not its "foreboding sparkle" (170). Likewise, the (embodied, human) phenomenologist or ecologist might interact with some aspects of a forest's phenomenal or causal properties, but these cannot exhaust the reality of the forest-in-itself without anthropocentrically reifying some intentional objects via the violent abjection of others. Harman's main objection to Whitehead, then, is

not that he identified prehension as the universal means of encounter, but that Whitehead himself perpetuates a certain anthropocentric overmining because he takes no account of the excess that objects may retain in their encounters with others. For OOO, all interobjective encounters are metaphysically real and none is more real (e.g., those involving something's atomic or chemical structure) than another (e.g., those involving phenomenal properties like odours or colours). However, no number of sensuous encounters can exhaust the reality of things. Objects themselves, unlike those decoupled properties which effect sensuous relationships, *always* "withdraw" and thus retain a reality inaccessible to their situated investigators even in principle (more on this later). That is how objects maintain their own radical alterity.

So, how is this metaphysical shift supposed to emancipate us from agrilogistics? One can elicit from Harman's and Morton's work three supposed benefits. Firstly, by flattening its underpinning ontology, OOO affords little scope for the anthropocentric hierarchism of the subject/object dualism which, Morton thinks, underpins modernist and postmodernist approaches alike. Moreover, arguably unlike Merchant's panpsychism, for instance, *this* ontological flattening is not obviously achieved by extending humanoid properties like atomic consciousness without reserve: a move which would not sufficiently problematize the hyperbolic terms of the underpinning dualism. It is achieved by empowering the adjected underside and embracing our own imminent objectivity: "[i]nstead of placing souls into sand or stones, we find something sandy or stony in the human soul" (Harman, *Quadruple Object* 46). OOO thereby again chimes with the recommendations of ecofeminists like Plumwood, who argues that a "non-reductive resolution" to the violence of our crisis situation "requires both that we reconceive ourselves as more animal and embodied, more 'natural,' and that we reconceive nature as more mindlike than in the Cartesian conception" (*Mastery of Nature*

abject withdrawal?

124). Morton would just think that, insofar as she remains committed to scientific naturalism (however "progressive"), Plumwood is limited in how far that commitment can take her.

The second benefit emphasizes how object withdrawal might upset the epistemology of mastery inherent to agrilogistics. If an object cannot be reduced to a privileged set of "mind-independent" or correlational properties, then OOO may resist the plastic conception of nonhuman objects which licences problematically totalizing approaches to the more-than-human world. This is because entities retain their own – *novel, causal* – powers, which are left unexhausted in any relation. OOO is therefore intended to be anathema to the abjection of agential or proto-agential novelty which licences the misplaced mechanism of mainstream scientific naturalism and/or the correlationist conception of nonhuman nature as unable to resist construction by its human colonizers. In OOO:

> A plastic bag isn't just for humans; it's for seagulls to choke on, and now we can see that thanks to photographers such as Chris Jordan who photograph beings who get caught up in the Pacific Garbage Vortex. A Styrofoam cup isn't just for coffee, it's for slowly being digested by soil bacteria for five hundred years. A nuclear device isn't just for your enemy. It's for beings 24,000 years from now […] The more we know about objects from the OOO point of view, the more we realize that we can't cleanse them of their "abject" qualities, because they aren't pristine, pure things, but pockmarked and pitted and oozing with all kinds of inconsistencies and anomalies – just like human beings. (Morton, *Being Ecological* 125, 132)

If, as Morton claims, our conception of the nonhuman world as being inherently knowable and ideally predictable is intimately linked to our violent and suicidal propensity to try to master and control it via misguided technoscientific means, then OOO may help us to "appreciate" (*Being Ecological* 179) (rather than merely consume, police or tolerate)

nonhuman things. OOO may, in short, enable us to take seriously that "being able to appreciate ambiguity is at the basis of being ecological" (179). Given that "OOO holds that strangeness is impossible if objects are reducible to their relations" (Morton, "Here Comes Everything" 185), this allegedly unique benefit of OOO also forms an important aspect of Morton's and Harman's objection to seemingly nonanthropocentric process philosophies like Whitehead's (Harman, *Quadruple Object* 137; Morton, *Realist Magic* 169).

The final benefit emphasizes the metaphysical realism in OOO. Whilst, given the partial means of prehensive access permitted by object withdrawal, real objects cannot fully grasp one another, OOO is not straightforwardly committed to the alleged fate of the phenomenologists and "deconstructive wise guys frolicking in a hermeneutic circle jerk when they should be having proper sex with the outside (other, heteros) world" (Morton, "Here Comes Everything" 171). OOO just concedes that human–nonhuman relations are "not the only show in town" (173); they are indicative of a more general species of interobjective prehension. Whilst Object-oriented ontologists admit the ubiquity of relational contact and thus reject the God's-eye-view of mainstream scientific realism, they can say *something* meaningful about the nonhuman world: "[a]t least OOO takes a shot at what objects are: they withdraw" (184). OOO's allegedly unique brand of outward-facing focus thereby enables it to pass *both* of Harman's "litmus tests" for nonanthropocentric realism. The first reads: "no philosophy does justice to the world unless it treats all relations as equally relations, which means as equally translations or distortions"; the second: "[o]f any philosophy we encounter, it can be asked whether it has anything to tell us about the impact of inanimate objects upon one another, apart from any human awareness of this fact" (Harman, *Quadruple Object* 46; *Guerrilla Metaphysics* 42). Answering "no" to this second question, Harman thinks, "condemn[s] philosophy to operate only as a reflexive meta-critique of the conditions of knowledge" (*Guerrilla Metaphysics* 42).

abject withdrawal?

4 withdrawal and alterity

While I am sympathetic to OOO's aims, there is a problem here. Recall that OOO intends to disrupt anthropocentrism via a rethinking of the dualistic subject/object terms which underpin "modernist" and "postmodernist" metaphysics alike. Doing so allegedly requires adopting a flattened ontology in which we adopt "the term 'object' in a value-neutral way, implying any real entity whatsoever, not objectification or subject–object dualism" (Morton, *Realist Magic* 160), each of which would encourage the violent abjection of genuine nonhuman others. Note, however, that, as Harman concedes in the long quotation above, it is through object *withdrawal* that OOO aims to secure the requisitely ambiguous concept of "object" to licence the benefits of nonanthropocentrism outlined in the previous section. It is because a withdrawing nonhuman thing cannot be reduced to scientistic data nor to what Harman calls a "metaphysics of relations" that it may retain novel causal powers and other metaphysically real characteristics that may nevertheless not show up for human consciousnesses (*Guerrilla Metaphysics* 50). However, there is a more problematic ambiguity what object withdrawal consists in and how it is supposed to afford these benefits via the "excess" that objects retain. What I want to argue here is that, insofar as they retain the presence/absence binary of the object term, and so do not rethink the ambiguity of things *to the root*, OOO remains poorly equipped for its metatheoretical task and may, inadvertently, perpetuate anthropocentric abjection under the banner of "radical nonanthropocentrism."

To explain, we must explore the metaphysics of withdrawal in more depth. For OOO, object withdrawal is a necessary condition of openness to nonhuman alterity insofar as we are otherwise restricted to anthropocentrically overmining and/or undermining phenomena. Thus,

if we are to appreciate heterogenous nonhuman things and disrupt the violence of the Anthropocene, the argument goes, we must also inoculate those things – metaphysically – against their reduction to the asymmetrical caricatures resulting from "confrontations" (always expressed in Baconian terms like "combat" or "duel") with others (Harman, *Guerrilla Metaphysics* 232–33; *Quadruple Object* 46, 76, 97, 103). If, as Harman and Morton claim (radicalizing Husserl), the naturalized mode of interobjective confrontation is *objectification*, then nonanthropocentric realism means insulating real objects in "secluded private vacuums" and limiting prehensive contact to the decoupled sensuous objects (broadly: "data") emitted by real objects ("things") and *never* the real objects themselves (*Guerrilla Metaphysics* 1; *Quadruple Object* 139).

However, within this framework, there are only two ways of understanding withdrawal, each of which is hostile to a genuine metaphysics of ambiguity by either fetishizing or collapsing nonhuman alterity. Taken in the radical sense outlined above, nonhuman alterity *is* retained via object withdrawal, but only in something akin to Emmanuel Levinas' sense of a "nonreciprocal relationship" in which the withdrawing other stands impenetrably apart (83). Like Harman (*Guerrilla Metaphysics* 103), Levinas thinks that where the other is made present to consciousness she is, at best, considered as an *alter ego* derivative from oneself and thus subject to the egomorphic imposition of one's norms, intentions and desires. *Absolute* alterity, which, for Levinas, becomes the basis of an ethical mode of relating to human others, is "problematically" precluded by phenomenology, for instance. Likewise, object-oriented ontologists charge phenomenologists with correlationism because phenomenology allegedly subsumes nonhuman entities into an anthropocentric intentional horizon.[16] OOO appears to be tied to something like an absolute conception of alterity because, despite reconfiguring the object term, their analyses still depend on the binary yes/no question of whether the object-in-itself is made entirely manifest to another.

abject withdrawal?

Since we cannot encounter real nonhuman objects, object-oriented ontologists conclude, *our* prehensive access is limited to those asymmetrical sensuous objects, which "exist only within experience" (Harman, *Quadruple Object* 69), and which show up for (i.e., in relation to) *us*.

Harman and Morton evidently *intend* object withdrawal to be taken in this radical sense.[17] However, doing so introduces a tension between admitting their situated and partial means of access to the more-than-human world and OOO's reliance upon a desituated and totalizing metaphysics, which, if Harman's first litmus test is to be believed, is *essential* to OOO's nonanthropocentrism. By their own lights, if they do subscribe to an absolute notion of object withdrawal, object-oriented ontologists simply lack the requisite contact with real things to accurately describe the real contours of their ontology or their allegedly universal means of interaction independent of those sensuous objects inaugurated relative to an embodied and historically situated human purview.

Moreover, in making any specific claims about the reality of other "objects" (including those we are attempting to liberate from uncritical instrumentalization: forest ecosystems, crude oil, and so on), OOO is seemingly returned to the de facto idealism of an absolutist account of the self/other relationship. OOO would presumably thereby *fail* Harman's second litmus test for correlationism, because it could not describe any specific objects or interobjective encounters (including interactions between nonhumans) independent of a situated perspective that "distorts" or "caricatures" them. Whilst this concession need not undermine OOO's capacity to inculcate a valuable critical *self*-reflexivity about our colonial tendencies, as the argument from correlationism is intended to demonstrate, insofar as this admission necessitates an inward-facing focus, object-oriented ontologists just do not think it enough to disrupt the anthropocentric dualism of agricultural monotheism.

It may be tempting to reply that Morton, at least, foresaw these issues, which is why he limits knowledge of nonhuman others to the contention that "objects withdraw." However,

there appear to be only two – equally problematic – ways of reading *this* claim. The first is to understand it as a blanket admission of the Kantian phenomena/noumena split where "objects withdraw" just means "we do not perceive objects": something that object-oriented ontologists deny and which, according to their own logic, would do little to support their realist and nonanthropocentric credentials.

The second is to understand Morton's claim as an objective metaphysical contention about *how* objects truly interrelate. But this cannot be right either, because it would contradict one of OOO's central commitments, namely Harman's contention (which Morton shares) that we cannot access, and thus accurately describe, real relations between other objects because any "*relation immediately generates a new object*" (Harman, *Quadruple Object* 117; Morton, *Realist Magic* 174). Morton might *want* to say something about how the fire withdraws from the cotton independent of a human witness, however, the only real object seemingly available for Morton to (com)prehend in any such encounter is the new object "fire-cotton-relation." Thus, further to the problem outlined above whereby, according to OOO's inner logic, "fire-cotton-relation" becomes the new sensuous object "fire-cotton-relation-for-Morton," Morton finds himself at third remove (i.e., *further*) from both the fire and cotton, and the "fire-cotton-relation-*for-cotton*" or "fire-cotton-relation-*for-fire*" he aims to describe via object withdrawal. He is, in short, wholly separated from all other nonhuman objects and their relations in the manner that OOO denounces as correlationist and, therefore, anthropocentric.

This error is exemplified in Morton's approving references to Jakob von Uexküll's *Umwelt* theory whereby each organism's experiences are limited to the proto-intentional objects generated according to their biological and functional orientation (*Realist Magic* 113). Given a tick's physiology, Uexküll argues, the "odour" of butyric acid exists *as* a phenomenon and the taste of raisins, does not. That is not to say that the tick configures raisins differently, but that "raisin-objects" do not form part of the composite structure of the

abject withdrawal?

tick's world at all. The glaring issue here, however, is that Uexküll was a card-carrying Kantian who thinks – at least when thinking consistently – that organisms are wholly limited to the objects constitutive of their *Umwelten but* retain the correlationist tendency to mistake these (e.g., anthropomorphic or arachnomorphic) objects for the *Umbegung*: "noumenal" reality-in-itself. For Uexküll, it is precisely *because* irreducibly embodied and situated creatures access the world in radically heterogenous ways that they cannot really access the worlds of genuine others.[18] One just cannot obviously deanthropocentrize Kant simply by multiplying the thing-world correlate without reserve as Morton (*Realist Magic* 227) insists.

I should nonetheless emphasize that I am less concerned here with the *tu quoque* charge that OOO might be correlationist than with why the mysterianism demanded by absolute alterity might prove detrimental in the context of the dualism behind our crisis situation. As Anna Mudde has also noted, Simone de Beauvoir offers an early version of one such concern in *The Second Sex*, where this mysterianism is linked to dualistic patriarchy:

> Of all these myths, none is more firmly anchored in masculine hearts than the feminine "mystery." It has numerous advantages. And first of all it allows an easy explanation for all that appears inexplicable; the man who does not "understand" a woman is happy to substitute an objective resistance for a subjective deficiency of mind; instead of admitting his ignorance, he perceives the presence of a "mystery" outside himself: an alibi, indeed, that flatters laziness and vanity at once […] And finally, thanks again to the mystery, that negative relation is perpetuated that seemed to Kierkegaard infinitely preferable to positive possession; faced with a living enigma, man remains alone – alone with his dreams, his hopes, his fears, his love, his vanity. This subjective game […] is for many a more attractive experience than an authentic relation with a human being […] Each is *subject* only for himself; each can grasp in immanence only himself, alone; from this point of view, the *other* is always a

> mystery […] But in accordance with the universal rule I have stated, the categories in which men think of the world are established *from their point of view, as absolute*: they misconceive reciprocity here as everywhere. A mystery for man, woman is as mysterious in essence.[19] (286)

Beauvoir's basic point in the passage above is that, by painting the underside of a given dualism (here: women) as *inherently* inaccessible, we absolve ourselves of the responsibility to understand or be corrected by them. We thereby licence a largely uncritical perpetuation of the hyperbolized identities, attitudes, and commitments of the upper side in such a manner as to perpetuate, rather than frustrate, the dualistic mindset.[20] Beauvoir accuses Levinas of being particularly guilty in this regard, given his contention that "otherness reaches its full flowering in the feminine, a term of the same rank as consciousness but of opposite meaning" (qtd in Beauvoir 15–16). For Beauvoir, then, absolute alterity has unwelcome political reverberations because it licences the self/other *dualism* and the violence subsequently legitimated towards those marked as "other"; a point to which, given his affinities with ecofeminism, Morton should surely be sympathetic.

Moreover, if, as Morton's argument from agrilogistics is intended to show, the subject/object and Absolute/Other dualisms are not limited to relationships between "men" and "women," then Beauvoir's charge that Levinas "deliberately takes a man's point of view, disregarding the reciprocity of subject and object" remains salient in a context whereby "man" more-or-less becomes "human" in the manner that feminist theorists have long problematized (16). If, as I suggested above, Harman's and Morton's notion of object withdrawal effectively extends Levinasian alterity without reserve, then it is plausible to suggest that we will not overcome the colonial violence implicit in agrilogistics by simply cancelling the subject and absolutizing the object, making *everything* mysterious *in exactly the same way*. If this is what withdrawal consists in, then Morton and Harman court what

abject withdrawal?

Plumwood calls a "truncated reversal" (*Mastery of Nature* 121) of the subject/object dualism, whereby the worst traits of the underside are retained and, subsequently, do little to disrupt the violence which imbues the terms of debate. By making the more-than-human world *wholly* other, it appears we effectively preclude the disruptive recognition of ambiguity that Morton, like Beauvoir, takes to be the root of an anticolonial mindset, and does so insidiously under the banner of "radical nonanthropocentrism."

But perhaps a conservative interpretation of object withdrawal may fare better. Although infrequent, and clearly in tension with some of their other commitments, in some sections of both Harman's and Morton's work, "excess" seems to mean something less radical: something more like "retains properties not *currently* shared with the other object." Morton ("Here Comes Everything" 165) courts this interpretation when he explains withdrawal by using the analogy of a coin which cannot show both sides to us at once, but which retains no substantive properties that are in-principle unavailable to us as human perceivers. According to this interpretation, one might never be able to see the coin's other side *as* its other side (i.e., *as* its excess), and so one has no access to the real object itself (i.e., in its entirety, which would be *impossible* given that differential sensuous profiles are not coextensive), however one *can* exhaustively describe the coin once one has flipped it over.[21] This conservative notion of object withdrawal would, in principle, permit access to heterogenous real and sensuous objects-in-themselves *via* their sensuous profiles, but not all of those profiles simultaneously, potentially nullifying the objection that withdrawal results in a problematic correlationism or mysterianism that is at odds with OOO's goals.

However, this account of object withdrawal suffers from a predictable problem. Given their situated and partial means of prehensive access, object-oriented ontologists' more conservative attempts to describe withdrawal and its residue are inevitably couched in human terms, either via naturalized scientific descriptions which are presented, bizarrely, as if

transcendently true, or suspiciously anthropomorphic descriptions under which the properties of objects interact in exactly the same terms we see in situated human experience. In terms of the former charge, Morton has a particular habit of articulating *the* metaphysical norms of prehension and withdrawal as those which are available to the suitably engaged (progressive?) quantum physicist. He says, for example, that:

> quantum theory is the only existing theory to establish firmly that things really do exist beyond our mind (or any mind). Quantum theory positively guarantees that real objects exist! Not only that – these objects exist beyond one another […] What does quantum theory show about our mental interactions with things? Perceptual, sensory phenomena such as hardness and brilliance are at bottom quantum mechanical effects. I can't put my hand through this table, because it is statistically beyond unlikely that the quanta at the tip of my finger could bust through the resistance wells in the quanta on the table's surface. *That's what solidity is* […] Quantum theory specifies that quanta withdraw from one another, including the quanta with which we measure them. In other words, quanta really are discrete, and one mark of this discreteness is the constant (mis)translation of one quantum by another. Thus, when you set up quanta to measure the position of a quantum, its momentum withdraws, and vice versa.[19] (Morton, *Realist Magic* 179–80)

As for the latter charge, a problematic anthropomorphism is apparent in Morton's and Harman's paradigm examples, where all the sensuous and withdrawing properties involved in spoon-soup and fire-cotton prehension (e.g., the cotton's flammability and aroma, or the fire's heat and "foreboding sparkle") are also freely available to *us* humans. Harman has further, related, tendency to attribute properties which emerge in specific sorts of (e.g., economic) relation with human beings to nonhuman things-in-themselves. He says, for

example, that it is "hard to know how an apple relates to *its own* features such as cold, red, hard, sweet, tangy, cheap and juicy in the first place" (Harman, *Quadruple Object* 95). There is little residual unfamiliarity or ambiguity here. Nor does there seem to be much chance of our surprise at the revelations the world itself throws up, problematizing OOO's ostensive ability to decentre the human purview.

Indeed, by adopting the conservative interpretation of object withdrawal, OOO would effectively embrace the sort of metaphysical naturalism that it rightly distances itself from on the grounds that it is incompatible with genuine nonhuman others. By equating metaphysical norms with human epistemic norms, a more conservative OOO would be guilty of what Plumwood calls "incorporation": the colonial act of defining the underside in a manner relative to the master identity rather than emancipating it in *its* alterity. Through incorporation, Plumwood argues, "the other is recognised only to the extent that it is assimilated to the self, or incorporated into the self and its systems of desires and needs: only as colonised by the self"; a move perhaps betrayed through Morton's throwaway comment that "there is no Nature, only people, some of whom are human beings" ("Ecologocentrism" 78; Plumwood, *Mastery of Nature* 56). Incorporation is problematic in the present context because, insofar as OOO naturalizes or anonymizes a situated master perspective, it embraces the same dualistic and ontotheological mindset that Morton denounces. Thus, if a conservative account of object withdrawal is inherently linked to the dualistic mechanism of incorporation – and the violent abjection of real others – it too is non-accidentally aligned with the colonial mindset of agrilogistics, only this time by collapsing, rather than fetishizing, alterity. As Stacy Alaimo puts it, although OOO puts "forth an ostensibly posthumanist ontology," it thereby retains "a humanist and masculinist sense of a disembodied subject" (15), and thus inherits the manifold problems with that position.[22] The conservative interpretation, it seems, fares little better than the Levinasian model.

5 conclusion

Above, we saw that it is through its allegedly unique ability to overcome the anthropocentric dualism of agrilogistics that OOO aims to provide the requisite metaphysical apparatuses to think the more-than-human world on its own terms and, ultimately, to frustrate the anthropogenic violence of the Anthropocene. OOO's supposed benefits here are threefold: by subscribing to a radically flattened and nonreductive ontology of objects, it is set against anthropocentric hierarchism; by emphasizing the inexhaustibility of things-in-themselves, OOO intends to preserve radical nonhuman alterity and to resist anthropocentric reductionism; finally, OOO is intended to preserve a robust metaphysical realism that liberates it from the introverted focus of correlationism.

On my reading, each of the aforementioned benefits is intimately linked to the notion of object withdrawal. However, there is a problematic ambiguity in what "object withdrawal" consists in. Above, I trialled two interpretations. The first takes withdrawal in the Levinasian sense whereby objects withdraw absolutely from their interlocutors. The other takes object withdrawal to be a more conservative phenomenon which need not make something's properties inaccessible, in principle, to other situated objects. Although OOO is predominantly drawn towards the former, both interpretations ultimately result in a similarly anthropocentric hostility to nonhuman alterity because either nonhuman entities are essentially inaccessible (and thus unable to "correct" our anthropocentric characterizations of them), or because engagement with them merely mirrors privileged human models. Since both approaches are implicated in a problematic abjection of nonhuman others, neither is obviously able to facilitate the anticolonial ambiguity that was OOO's supposed merit.

abject withdrawal?

Accordingly, neither interpretation is obviously able to support the benefits outlined above because the ontology is flattened, but (effectively) only according to the terms of a non-innocent, situated human purview; because nonhuman things retain unexhausted properties, but these are either entirely inaccessible or mere echoes of those available within (a contested conception of) situated human experience; and finally because, insofar as it may pass its own tests for realism, OOO is effectively reduced to a particular anthropocentric form of naturalism that its proponents rightly distance themselves from.

As a parting salvo, it is worth noting that object-oriented ontologists appear *unable* – in principle – to find a middle way between positions to salvage the requisite ambiguity to disrupt anthropogenic violence. If what I have argued above is on the right lines, OOO is tied to the dilemma between absolute and conservative alterity because its fundamental prejudice is to treat all things as objects which are either wholly present or entirely absent from their situated investigator. It was, after all, this dilemma that led Harman and Morton to invoke the sensuous objects which either become effectively homogenous or problematically familiar (conservative alterity) or else banish all real nonhuman objects and interactions to the realm of the inaccessibly other (absolute alterity). Any third way which would understand access to be partial or gradated configurations of the phenomena really motivated by the more-than-human world itself – as is common in ecofeminism or ecophenomenology, for instance – would fail Harman's litmus tests and be deemed unpalatably correlationist. In short, overcoming the presence/absence binary, which is implicated in the anthropocentric dualism behind the violence of the Anthropocene, is incompatible with any approach which takes that binary to be a basic ontological feature of the things themselves. And that is why, despite the emperor's new "radically nonanthropocentric" clothes, OOO appears to be particularly poorly suited to the task at hand.

The question remains: if, despite its burgeoning influence, OOO's metaphysical commitments make it inherently unsuitable to make good on its promise to disrupt dualistic anthropocentrism, then where might environmental politics, the environmental humanities, or mainstream environmental activism turn next? It seems to me that the most fruitful lines of enquiry concern "third way" positions like those mentioned above (e.g., ecofeminism and ecophenomenology) which share Morton's aim of disrupting dualistic violence, but which may resist the presence/absence binary which was OOO's undoing. Of course, *their* promise rests, in part, on their ability to overcome the charge of a pernicious correlationism.[23] And that is a discussion for another time.

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abject withdrawal?

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Robert Booth (Liverpool Hope University)

Hope Park

Liverpool L16 9JD

UK

E-mail: Boothr1@hope.ac.uk

Robert Booth has lectured in Philosophy at the universities of Liverpool and Manchester, and Liverpool Hope University. His research focuses mainly on how work done at the intersection between phenomenology, ecofeminism, and new materialism might provide fruitful means of tackling the environmental crisis. He has recently published work in *Environmental Philosophy*, *PhaenEx*, and *The Anthropocene Review*. He is currently working on a monograph on ecophenomenology, inspired by the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, entitled *Becoming a Place of Unrest: Environmental Crisis and Ecophenomenological Praxis* (under contract with Ohio University Press).

1 E.g., Booth; Bruno; Golumbia; Leavitt Pearl; Richmond; Toadvine; Zahavi. Mudde and Alaimo are honourable exceptions.

2 E.g., Graham and Thrift; Meehan, Shaw, and Marston; Meehan; Mitchell; Schwanen; Shaw and Meehan; Thrift, *Non-representational Theory*; "The 'Sentient' City."

3 Nativ; Oral. Harman had a much-cited piece ("Materialism Must Be Destroyed") published in the prestigious geography journal *Environment and Planning D.*

4 TheBestSchools.org. Both Morton and Harman now have more citations than any of the hugely influential philosopher David Lewis' single most cited works.

5 The *Guardian* dubbed Morton the "Philosopher Prophet of the Anthropocene" and he was consulted by NASA about which messages to send out to extra-terrestrials in a follow-up to the original Voyager mission (Blasdel).

6 Reading OOO can be a bewildering and infuriating experience. Given that their philosophical preoccupation is primarily aesthetic, rather than logocentric (more on this later), perhaps the evasiveness of their actual (i.e., markedly philosophical) arguments should not be entirely surprising. However, this apparently wilful obscurantism does little to encourage philosophical engagement with OOO. Nonetheless, as their broader impact would imply, I think (apparently *contra* Zahavi) that one can elicit from Harman's and Morton's work a philosophically coherent (if not entirely convincing) set of arguments for the power

abject withdrawal?

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and promise of OOO. The following is my attempt to sympathetically reconstruct what *I take* to be their most important underlying arguments.

7 What ecofeminists are more attentive to, however, is that these ills are usually felt much more keenly by those who constitute dualism's underside (e.g., women, indigenous peoples, or occupants of the Global South). This lack of attention to heterogeneity in OOO will become important in what follows.

8 Ecologists and ecologically minded philosophers may be more prone to claim that the energy flows constituting biospheric webs are more real than their constituent "objects," however, Morton thinks, these positions retain the logic of agricultural monotheism via the relational (if not straightforwardly correlationist) "overmining" strategy explored in the following section (*Being Ecological* 98–99; Harman, *Quadruple Object* 9–11). Insofar as it reduces things to qualities rather than determinate substances, Harman is amenable to the contention that mainstream science is guilty of undermining and overmining simultaneously (*Quadruple Object* 13–15).

9 Morton argues that the metaphysics of presence licences a particular lack of engagement with anthropogenic climate change since, unlike localized weather conditions, "global warming" can never be wholly present to us, hence its designation as a "hyperobject" (*Being Ecological* 22).

10 E.g., Cronon; Vogel.

11 E.g., Toadvine; Bannon.

12 Whilst this relies on a problematic understanding of phenomenology (Booth), here is not the place to discuss that issue.

13 The same problem faces post-Kantian positivistic scientific approaches like Niels Bohr's (Morton, *Realist Magic* 172).

14 The same might be said of Meillassoux's speculative materialism, who, in his eagerness to address mind-independent things-in-themselves, reinstates the dualistic and utilitarian terms of the Cartesian *res extensa* (*After Finitude* 3, 115). Morton elsewhere offers a more spurious argument against ecofeminism focusing on its apparent commitment to dualistic essentialism, which I omit here ("Queer Ecology" 274).

15 This argument can, however, only function at a limited epistemic level. The fire is oblivious to the cotton's aroma, but it nevertheless (ontologically) changes it as it burns. The sort of intentional encounter object-oriented ontologists describe cannot, therefore, be "in any sense definitive" of encounters more broadly (Shaviro 105–06).

16 Levinas never explicitly claims that we are unable to know others due to some epistemic limitation of access. His point is that all knowing totalizes and our ethical responsibility to others is an altogether different manner of relating. Nevertheless, to fully understand Levinas' objection to phenomenology, he (like Harman and Morton) must think that one cannot gain even a *degree* of epistemic access to the other without problematically collapsing their alterity. Likewise, OOO is not merely concerned with epistemological or ontological matters. As Morton's work shows, object-oriented ontologists diagnose a certain ethical

abject withdrawal?

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salience to the attempt to address nonhuman others on their own terms. The two positions are much closer than one might think.

17 See Harman, *Quadruple Object* 112, 128; Morton, *Realist Magic* 56, 78, 174, 190.

18 Ironically, Harman (*Guerrilla Metaphysics* 41–42) levels this criticism against Levinas.

19 Although Morton would object to Beauvoir's use of the word "subject," this can be replaced with Morton's nonreductive use of the term "object" without diminishing the force of her objection.

20 Beauvoir's charge has much in common with Meillassoux's objection that correlationism promotes the conflation of "species solipsistic" norms with (allegedly inaccessible) reality itself, and that "correlational reason thereby legitimates *all* those discourses that claim access to an absolute, *the only proviso being that nothing in these discourses resembles a rational justification of their validity*" (44–45, 50).

21 See also Morton, "Here Comes Everything" 177–84; *Realist Magic* 88, 167; *Being Ecological* 171.

22 In response to this sort of objection, Morton cites Jane Bennett's contention that, as a tonic for the reductive mechanism of mainstream scientific naturalism, "a little anthropomorphism […] may be a net benefit to our understanding of things" (qtd in Morton, *Realist Magic* 203). However, given the force of the charge of incorporation, such anthropomorphism can be only

a short sharp shock to awaken us from a reductive physicalist purview. And we do not need OOO for *that*.

23 I remind the reader that, unlike some of those cited above (e.g., Bruno; Golumbia; Leavitt Pearl) I am more concerned with why the charge of correlationism might *matter* than with whether it is true. And I see reason for optimism in this regard. See Booth, for instance, for a more in-depth treatment of the claim that ecophenomenology may evade the negative consequences of correlationism even if the charge might in some sense hold true.